

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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This is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/785,714, filed February 16, 2001, ^{now U.S. patent No. 6,726,726,} which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/492,406, filed January 27, 2000, ^{now U.S. patent No. 6,508,842,} which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/325,297, filed June 3, 1999, ^{now abandoned.}

The present invention relates to prosthetic devices and more particularly to a plate/socket attachment for attaching a vacuum source to the socket cavity of an artificial limb.

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An amputee is a person who has lost part of an extremity or limb such as a leg or arm which commonly may be termed as a residual limb. Residual limbs come in various sizes and shapes with respect to the stump. That is, most new amputations are either slightly bulbous or cylindrical in shape while older amputations that may have had a lot of atrophy are generally more conical in shape. Residual limbs may further be characterized by their various individual problems or configurations including the volume and shape of a stump and possible scar, skin graft, bony prominence, uneven limb volume, neuroma, pain, edema or soft tissue configurations.

Referring to Figs. 1 and 2, a below the knee residual limb 10 is shown and described as a leg 12 having been severed below the knee terminating in a stump 14. In this case, the residual limb 10 includes soft tissue as well as the femur 16, knee joint 18, and severed tibia 20 and fibula 22. Along these bone structures surrounded by soft tissue are nerve bundles and vascular routes which must be protected against external pressure to avoid neuromas, numbness and discomfort as well as other kinds of problems. A below the knee residual limb 10 has its stump 14 generally characterized as being a more bony structure while an above the knee residual limb may be characterized as including more soft tissue as well as the vascular routes and nerve bundles.

Referring to Fig. 2, amputees who have lost a part of their arm 26, which terminates in a stump 28 also may be characterized as having vascular routes, nerve bundles as well as soft and bony tissues. The residual limb 10 includes the humerus bone 30 which extends from below the shoulder to the elbow from which the radius 34 and ulna 36 bones may pivotally extend to the point of severance. Along the humerus bone 30 are the biceps muscle